

Ecuador's president ready to allow Julian Assange to be extradited to US

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31 July 2018

Ecuador's President Lenín Moreno yesterday made his most explicit statement yet of his government's willingness to hand over WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange to the British authorities to be imprisoned and then extradited to the United States.

Moreno's comments indicate that negotiations with Britain's Conservative Party government are at an advanced stage, with the intent of forcing Assange to leave Ecuador's London embassy on the terms being demanded by the British and US administrations.

Ecuador granted Assange political asylum six years ago to protect him from being extradited to the US to potentially face jail for life or the death penalty on trumped-up espionage and conspiracy charges. Like the Obama administration before it, the Trump White House wants Assange silenced for good because WikiLeaks published material exposing the atrocities, mass surveillance, regime-change operations and other anti-democratic machinations of Washington and its allies.

Now, in an attempt to ingratiate themselves with the Trump administration and the imperialist governments in Europe, Moreno's government and ruling party are in the process of revoking that asylum and throwing Assange into the hands of the same US state apparatus, with its long proven record of detentions without trial, assassinations, torture and "disappearances."

In an interview Monday with the Spanish daily *El País*, during an official visit in Madrid, Moreno said Assange would have to accept that, as soon as he steps outside the embassy, he will be jailed for supposedly skipping bail when he was granted asylum in 2012. This is despite the fact that the bail issue was made redundant last year after Swedish authorities finally dropped a fabricated sexual assault "investigation" of Assange, terminating the European Arrest Warrant

against him.

"Ideally, we would debate with Mr Assange and his lawyer whether he would be willing to accept the conditions that the United Kingdom is submitting for the possibility of an exit," Moreno said, according to a translation by the *Telesur* web site.

"If this happens, we believe there would be a sentence he would have to complete for having violated the principle of presenting himself formally before the British law. And once this would be done, he could right after this enjoy the right to be extradited to a country where he does not run any risk."

Far from a "enjoying a right" to be extradited to a safe country, Assange would face the prospect of extradition from Britain to the only country demanding it—the United States. The single apparent request of Moreno's government is for a meaningless promise that the US authorities will not seek the death penalty.

According to a translation of another part of the interview by the London-based, Murdoch-owned *Times*, Moreno told *El País*: "Mr Assange has been in this situation for more than five years and we have to find a way out ... that defends his rights, mainly his right to life, and at the same time can give Ecuador the possibility of not having what undoubtedly represents a problem for our country."

By "right to life," Moreno evidently means just a US promise not to execute Assange. Seemingly, Moreno has no qualms about Assange being thrown into solitary confinement, possibly for life, which would be an effective political death penalty.

Moreover, any assurance against execution would be worthless given the brutal record of US imperialism. When Mike Pompeo, now the US secretary of state, was CIA director last year, he directly accused WikiLeaks of being a "hostile intelligence service."

Under the US Espionage Act such activity can be subject to the death penalty.

The Trump administration's threats have mounted since last year, when WikiLeaks began publishing documents detailing the massive computer hacking and spying conducted by the CIA.

In his interview, Moreno effectively junked the fundamental right to political asylum, saying: "It is not the exercise of human rights compliance that a person remains so long as an asylum-seeker."

But Assange has been trapped inside Ecuador's embassy for so long precisely because successive British and US governments have refused to recognise his asylum.

Moreno also wiped his hands of Assange's Ecuadorian citizenship, saying it was granted by the country's previous foreign affairs minister, Maria Fernanda Espinosa. She awarded citizenship to the WikiLeaks founder in January in an attempt to secure his free passage to Ecuador, only to have British Prime Minister Theresa May's government refuse to recognise that right.

On Saturday, Assange's lawyers said they will contest any extradition proceedings. Jennifer Robinson, a member of Assange's legal team, told CNN: "For us, protecting him from US extradition is absolutely paramount and the most important and fundamental principle that must be respected.

"There should never be a situation where a publisher is sent to the US to face prosecution for that activity, so we will, if forced, fight his extradition in the British courts."

Robinson repeated her previous warnings about the impact of Assange's prolonged detention on his health. "The situation is untenable," she said. "His health is being irreparably damaged ... This case cannot go on much longer."

According to the *Times*, Assange's doctor Sonda Crosby has expressed doubts about the WikiLeaks editor's ability to weather an ongoing heatwave. However, a former consul at Ecuador's embassy, Fidel Narvaez, who saw Assange two weeks ago, told CNN he remained determined to fight any termination of his asylum.

"He is made for a big fight and I think he faces difficult and adverse situations with strength," Narvaez said. "He is a very strong man but remember he lives in

a small flat, without natural light, just with artificial light."

The immense danger confronting Assange has been intensified by the efforts being made by the FBI and other US "deep state" agencies, backed by the Democratic Party, to charge Assange and WikiLeaks with acting on behalf of Russian intelligence by publishing politically revealing emails from the Democratic Party and its 2016 presidential candidate Hillary Clinton.

Those emails exposed the party leadership's deliberate sabotage of Bernie Sanders' presidential campaign and Clinton's secret pledges to fully protect the interests of her Wall Street backers.

Assange has always denied the allegations of a Russian connection for the email leaks. He told Fox News in January 2017: "Our source is not the Russian government, and it is not a state party."

Robinson, Assange's lawyer, again told CNN: "WikiLeaks has made very clear they were not engaged in any way with the Russian state with respect to that publication."

Assange remains an Australian citizen, but the Turnbull Liberal-National government, supported by the Labor Party opposition, has continued its complicity in the US-British-Ecuadorian conspiracy against Assange. It has defied calls, spearheaded by the Socialist Equality Party, for it to intervene to secure Assange's right to return to Australia, if he wishes, with guarantees against extradition to the US.

As these experiences demonstrate, the defence of Assange, and every fundamental democratic right, depends on the political mobilisation of the working class, against all the capitalist governments, and the trade unions and other organisations that support them. This must include the preparation of mass protests and strikes against any attempt to arrest or extradite him.



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